

Once upon a time, there was a young Test team. So good was their camaraderie, that they almost always called each other by their medieval military-themed nicknames, and saluted their captain as the General. Although they were a talented bunch, their relative inexperience and the absence of a head coach to lead their spartan support staff made them the underdogs. However, they somehow defied the odds, and with street-smart, fighting cricket, and generous portions of luck, they scraped through to the Finals.

Their opponents, however, had a commanding run, and were undoubtedly the best team in their draw. They were head and shoulders above our protagonists in terms of career statistics and experience. They were referred to as the Sailors led by the invincible batter Admiral, given their propensity to swearing, and brewing up storms, both on and off the field.

The Final was a pink-ball Test, with a substantial part of it forecast to be played under cloudy skies. The first afternoon, though, was bright and sunny, and both General and Admiral knew the significance of the toss as they walked out. The coin fell in Admiral's favour. "We're going to bat first."

Day 1

General and his confident men soon took their positions in the field. General took his vantage point as the wicket-keeper, marshalling troops, and exuding reassurance. Quartermaster and Professor stood in the slip cordon by his side. Quartermaster had the uncanny ability of taking conditions as input, and giving statistical predictions as output. His understanding would help the team set itself realistic goals, hour by hour, session by session, day by day. Except he wasn't the most optimistic of souls. "They're going to motor along till sunset" he said, wryly. "That's alright" replied General, "Professor here is going to watch them closely, and we're going to have an even better plan to cash in under the lights." Professor laughed, "I should really start giving y'all homework too... no General, we have outgrown that clichéd 'draw them across and nip one back in'. My plan relies on the big guy there" he nodded to the bowler at the other end.

Pink Demon, simply put, was a beast of a strike bowler. He was tall, he was quick, he had a helmet shattering bouncer, a toe crushing yorker, and everything in between, all delivered at breakneck left-arm pace. He got his name because the sorcery he worked with the pink ball under the lights was beyond science; his own team attributed it to black magic. At his side was the wily Lieutenant. Lieutenant was the deputy captain, and a clever tactician. He would stand at mid-off and serve as the cornerman for the bowlers, encouraging them to pitch it up, and signalling with a subtle, mischievous wink when he thought the effort ball was due.

Lieutenant glanced around the field. He attributed his success to General's strategy and bowling changes, which, although sometimes unconventional, al-

ways felt organic given the tactics he had in mind. And, of course, the bowling attack complemented each other brilliantly. Lieutenant quickly surveyed his other frontline quicks before the action began.

He peered over to fine leg, where Agent stood, almost dreaming. “Typical Agent” thought Lieutenant. He was a walking paradox: seemingly lost to himself, but always in the right place and the right time; incomprehensible, but always understanding what the team needed; quirky, but a highly effective fast bowler the opposition could never decipher.

Lieutenant’s gaze then shifted across to Bomber, who kept stretching at third man. Bomber was the workhorse, tasked with making the opposition as uncomfortable as possible. Even on unresponsive decks, he could run in and bowl long spells of short, hard lengths, forcing the busiest batters into their shells. Lieutenant smiled as he noticed Bomber exchange a meaningful glance with General, as if to say, “I know it’s going to be a long afternoon, I got this.”

“Gentlemen, play.”

Pink Demon charged in, and sent one down the fifth stump line, that was comfortably left. The first over was an uneventful maiden. Agent started proceedings from the other end. He got the new ball to wobble delightfully, and asked far more questions of the outside edge from the corridor of uncertainty. The opener was up to the task, which was made easier by the true bounce. Another maiden.

In the next over, Pink Demon figured out how much straighter to bowl. He was met with a solid defensive block, that went to the right of Sniper at point. Sniper swooped in like an eagle, picked up the ball, and threw it at the non-striker’s end, in a single graceful motion. A direct hit! The batters had just about scampered safely through for their first run. This effort, however, buoyed the fielding side.

The openers got their eye in just before Drinks. Agent was bowling beautifully, and constantly probed the outside edge. Pink Demon didn’t seem as potent in the perfect batting conditions, and so, Bomber was introduced as the first change. He struck in his fourth over: having crossed fifty, the openers were looking to up the scoring rate. Bomber’s short delivery rushed the batter, and he top-edged his pull to fine leg. Admiral walked in at number three, and saw off the remaining overs to Tea. 79 for 1, this session was the batters’.

Tea, Day 1

The batting side came out looking to consolidate before sundown. They batted with intent. Agent was taken out of the attack after a brilliant, but fruitless opening spell. General rotated his bowlers shrewdly to deny the batters their rhythm. He turned to Bomber to stem the scoring rate, and to the accurate medium pace of Sniper in tandem to compound the frustration. He then deployed the wily wrist spin of Wizard. Lieutenant would lay traps, and eventually,

a set batter holed out just after Drinks. With a new batter in, General brought Agent back on, and this time, he found the outside edge, which Professor gleefully pouched. In the same over, he tricked another new batter with a cunning change of pace, and got a catch off the leading edge.

Admiral counterattacked with a vengeance. He blunted Agent and drove him, he swept Wizard, he pulled Bomber, and ferociously cut Sniper. Only the clever part-time finger spin of Professor could keep him quiet as sunset drew closer. The lights came on one by one, and the shadows grew longer. One shadow was larger than the rest: that of Pink Demon.

Professor carefully studied the body language of Admiral's batting partner. He could see the relief setting in, and pointed it out to General. Bomber was bowling the penultimate over before Dinner. General had to keep Admiral off strike for the last over before the break. He quietly directed Sniper at cover-point to come in closer. Admiral played a defensive prod to the left of Sniper off the final ball. His partner was backing up aggressively, but Sniper was ready to throw in a flash. "No run!" called Admiral. *That motherfucker is ambidextrous*, he noticed, in horror.

General couldn't contain his smile as he tossed the ball to Pink Demon. The twilight sky was fittingly crimson to mark his return into the attack. As Admiral would discover, he had found the best way of facing this beast: namely, from the non-striker's end. Pink Demon charged in, fresh, and tails up. The aging ball wobbled as it angled across the right hander. It was perfectly pitched up, and seamed back in. It skidded through the complacent gap between bat and pad, and crashed into the furniture. An emphatic end to the evening session, and an ominous sign for the night.

Dinner, Day 1

The sailors resumed at 220 for 5. Pink Demon's spell would span the entire session, and he was *unplayable*. He found an uncomfortable angle and line, and the ball would rise from a length. The lower middle order was simply no match for him. They scrambled to get out of the way of the venomous short ball, would get softened up, and play all over the inswinging yorker. Only Admiral could stand up to the test, and find the courage to punish the occasional indisciplined delivery, despite being beaten every now and then. It was a riveting duel: the young, unstoppable force, against the seasoned, immovable object. Pink Demon ran through Admiral's partners and collected a five wicket haul. Admiral found ways to farm the strike and score from the other end, and registered a magnificent century. At Stumps, the score was 312 for 9, and the individual battle was a tense draw.

Day 2

The next afternoon was sunny, but dark clouds were looming on the horizon. Good batting conditions would last for an hour. Admiral knew what he had to do. For the first few overs, he farmed the strike, and played excruciatingly defensively. General watched helplessly as the innings would effectively be decided by the approaching clouds. The skies darkened. Admiral turned to General. “Wonderful for batting, isn’t it?” he sneered. With that, he let loose. Armed with the long handle, he swung with almost sadistic abandon, and deposited the ball into the stands multiple times. Thankfully, a yorker from Sniper found its mark when Admiral tried to get too cheeky. The innings ended at 351.

Quartermaster and Lieutenant strode out to open the response. The opposition was buoyed by the last wicket partnership, and the fact that the weather overwhelmingly favoured them. The new ball skidded and zipped, the noisy fielders circled them like vultures, and the opposition supporters were boisterous. They resolutely played inside the line, but it always felt like they were batting on the edge of a knife, batting on borrowed time. Miraculously, they crawled unscathed to 14 for 0 at the stroke of Tea.

Tea, Day 2

They realised that clouds or not, they had to attack before batting got even more treacherous after Dinner. Lieutenant showed the first sign of intent, responding to a fractionally overpitched delivery with a textbook straight drive. Quartermaster joined the act. He knew his overs were numbered, and so he used his compact frame to his advantage to slash, and slash hard at anything marginally short. The ball would fly over the slip cordon, but also scream through the covers as he got his eye in. But then, sometimes there are the deliveries that you can do nothing about. The ones that start angling in, but straighten just a touch. Quartermaster nicked one of those to the keeper, and resigned himself to the fact that the inevitable had occurred.

“We’re fucked.” was his terse analysis to General when he returned to the dressing room.

Tank walked in at number three. He was the most technically sound batter in the squad, and, true to his name, had a knack for simply absorbing the pressure and damage from hostile situations. Despite the struggle, he outwardly seemed a lot more assured, almost immune to the minefield his team found itself in. The scoreboard inched forward as Tank and Lieutenant steadied the innings, until Lieutenant was bowled by another peach, bringing General to the crease. They tried building the partnership at a quicker scoring rate, but the bowling was just too disciplined, with the overcast skies making it all the more potent. The few calculated risks they took were rewarded sparingly. One fateful delivery, Tank misjudged the bounce, and was adjudged leg before without offering a shot. A desperate review showed that it was down to the Umpire’s Call.

Cannonball was next in the line-up, he arrived with a few overs left before Dinner. He stamped his authority with a glorious cover drive off his very first ball. He was stylish and fearless, and arguably the most capable batter in the squad. Tank would reliably set the innings up, and General would consistently hold it together, but Cannonball, oozing flair, was the designated match-winner. He infused the impetus the innings needed, and this time, it was no different. They headed to Dinner at 93 for 3, with cautious optimism.

Dinner, Day 2

Run making under the lights proved difficult, even for the flamboyant Cannonball. General was more naturally disposed to bide his time, but Cannonball needed to be busy. They played out a handful of maidens on the trot. Finally, Cannonball decided to take the spinner on. He came down the track, and could only push it to mid-on. He immediately called for a single, and the trusting General obliged. But there just wasn't a run there. Cannonball went white as he realised, and frantically sent his skipper back. But alas, it was too late, and the run-out had been completed.

In came Professor, who was just about managing to negotiate the conditions. His innings hung by a thread. Cannonball felt guilt for the runout, and more responsibility than ever for protecting the lower order. Every over was dangerous, and he could not find the time or peace of mind to consult Professor, gather his thoughts, and form a set game plan. A well directed short ball came his way. On an ordinary day, his natural instincts would put it away effortlessly. If he were told to be defensive, he was more than capable of evading it. But alas, indecision does far more damage than any bad decision ever would. He was caught in two minds. The ball took the shoulder of the bat, and ballooned up to offer gully a dolly.

From there on, it was a procession. Professor. Wizard. Sniper. They hit a couple of boundaries, but couldn't withstand the sustained pressure. Bomber. Agent. Pink Demon. The tail did not wag for long. They folded for a paltry 139 at the stroke of Stumps.

Day 3 was also forecast to be cloudy, and Admiral did not hesitate in enforcing the follow-on, and going for the jugular. Professor and Quartermaster discussed the situation with General and Lieutenant till late in the night. They talked about adjustments to the stance. Lieutenant played the devil's advocate, but the Professor's suggestions were indeed foolproof.

"I want General to open the batting with me the next morning" declared Quartermaster. "We need to bat time. He's the only one their bowling couldn't beat." "Hmm," quipped Professor, "And plus, he needs enough rest before an intense Day 5." Quartermaster laughed like Professor's optimism was lunacy. "But Quartermaster, don't you believe?" asked Lieutenant. "I put my faith in facts." he replied, evenly. "And what can you say for a fact about Day 4 then?"

prodded General. “Forecast to be bright and clear.” there was a glimmer, just a glimmer, in Quartermaster’s eyes. “General, do you think we can...”

“...Bat out the entirety of Day 3, and let Cannonball loose on Day 4?”

“Jinx.”

They woke Tank up, and explained the scenario. General went through the top-order, making eye contact along the way. “Quartermaster. General. Tank. Lieutenant. We have a job. On Day 3, we protect Cannonball and the middle order at all costs.” They all nodded solemnly. “We ride at dawn.”

Day 3

When Quartermaster and General strode out, they knew the scoreboard didn’t matter that day. All that mattered was their occupation of the crease. General wasn’t very accustomed to the brand new ball. Quartermaster took it upon himself to do the majority of the work in blunting it. A few overs later, General, the natural stroke-maker, started using his abilities to generate sound run-scoring opportunities. They distanced themselves from the scoreboard situation, and magically, batting didn’t seem as treacherous as it was the previous day. Just at the stroke of Tea, General offered a difficult half-chance, but it was put down.

“You need to bat through. The ball isn’t so new anymore, my main role is half played” said Quartermaster. “Let’s defend till Tea, and then I’ll attack after the break.” At 52 for 0 after the first session, General agreed Quartermaster’s assessment was spot on. They were still 160 arrears, and Quartermaster was the most suited to take risks.

Tea, Day 3

General, the fluid stroke-maker, would play elegant drives off anything fuller. This forced the lengths shorter, which Quartermaster would capitalise on with his nimble footwork. He got the license to live and die by the sword, and after an afternoon of toil, he raced to his fifty in the evening. The deficit soon looked less daunting, and Quartermaster went back to batting conservatively.

Admiral brought spin on, and it was enough to break Quartermaster’s rhythm. After a session and a half, a wicket fell against the run of play. In came Tank, to a situation tailor-made for his batting. Spin was unsuited to the current conditions, and was only effective as a ploy against Quartermaster. General realised this before Admiral, and took the attack to the hapless tweaker. Admiral evaluated General’s aggression as undue, and kept the spinner on in hopes of a bigger breakthrough. General was too classy for that: Admiral realised his folly only a few benign and expensive overs later. But it was too late, as the scoreboard shot up to 137 for 1, General crossed fifty and gained momentum, Tank settled in, and they walked to Dinner with a spring in their step.

Dinner, Day 3

Admiral was confident that the session under lights would be a rout, just like before. However, he had failed to factor in the technical adjustments that were proving effective against his attack. He wasn't accounting for the energy General, Quartermaster, and Tank had sapped his men of. And, of course, he was up against General and Tank, the team's most sound batters.

Our protagonists still faced a trial by fire when they walked out. The full moon was masked by dense clouds, the floodlights were ominous. The chants of the crowd served to further embolden the opposition. But General and Tank were prepared.

Quartermaster sighed in admiration, "If only this session didn't exist, and we could jump to Day 4." General and Tank took that quite literally. The marauding strike bowler steamed in, and fired one full and straight. Tank blocked, with a nearly dead bat. It was symbolic of the maidens that were to follow. It wasn't that they couldn't score, it was almost as if they didn't want to. They didn't pay any attention to the attempted stare-downs, they treated it as just another stonewalling challenge in a training session. If anyone could pull it off, it was this pair.

General was offered the most tempting of half-volleys. He let it pass. The stump mic caught nasty sledges and taunts. But all the words seemed to bounce off their helmets. They were in their state of Zen. Of course they would cop criticism from analysts, but who among them had so much at stake? They knew that being ultra defensive in this session was the most aggressive option they had in the context of the match. And so they blocked, and blocked, and blocked, and occasionally rotated strike to disrupt the bowler's plans. The bowling was top notch, and still occasionally found the edge, but they played with such soft hands that the ball dropped infuriatingly short.

The fields got so bizarre that sometimes, even the gentlest of pushes would roll to the fence. The strategy slowly dawned on the supporters. As the session wore on, the prospect of a Day 4 onslaught became increasingly apparent. And as Stumps drew nearer, every over safely and assuredly negotiated was met with a loud cheer. What a miracle: on a hunting ground for bowlers, it was the batters' supporters who were more vocal.

Four overs before Stumps, Tank walked up to General, "Let me farm the strike. You need to bat and enjoy yourself a bit tomorrow." It was a frustrating day for Admiral. He threw everything he had at Tank, for a final burst. In the last over, Tank knew that he had done his job. He attacked. Six! The crowd went bonkers. And four more! They were up on their feet. It didn't matter that he was dismissed on the last ball of the day. General and Tank walked back to a standing ovation, having ended Day 3 on 172 for 2. They were only trailing by 40, they had all their best stroke-makers in play for the best batting conditions on Day 4. This could very well effectively be a second-innings shootout.

Day 4

General and Cannonball soaked up the warm applause and sunshine when they walked out on Day 4. The bowlers were fatigued, and proceedings started with a short, wide loosener. It would have been an easy leave in the previous session, but not today. General dispatched it in a flash. It took a while for the fielding side to realise and accept that they had fallen out of the weather Gods' favour, and no longer held the right to attack. By then, Cannonball played himself in, and General notched up his hundred with a few classy strokes. It had been a tremendous innings, but his celebrations were muted, for he knew there was a long way to go.

The supporters had their money's worth that afternoon. General and Cannonball, the two best strikers of the ball, putting the most fearsome attack to the sword under clear picnic skies. But, a few overs after Drinks, General suffered a lapse in concentration, and top-edged his pull high into the sky. "Carry on," he said to Cannonball as they crossed, "you can win this for us."

"Win this for us." Cannonball only knew one way to do that. Egged on by Lieutenant, he played his natural game. He exhibited his trademark blockbuster batting the crowds had grown to adore him for. He respected the bowling, but made his mark, being authoritative on the front foot, and solid off the back foot. He would come down the track to unsettle the spinners, and then rock back and cut them with surgical precision as they dropped short.

Lieutenant was emboldened too. He knew exactly what kind of stroke-play was optimal in these conditions, and was a genius at reading bowlers' minds. His technique was adaptive and versatile, and he soon joined the run-fest. They went in to Tea at a healthy 275 for 3.

Tea, Day 4

The pitch was now deteriorating after a day of sunshine, and the evening session was the window the spinners had on make an impact. There was turn, and increasingly uneven bounce. This time, Admiral got the deployment of spin right, as the runs dried up after Tea. Like the previous day, spin accounted for a regular opener's wicket - that of Lieutenant, a little after halfway through the session.

General counterattacked by promoting the big-hitting Sniper up the order. Sniper didn't care much for Test batting sensibilities like putting a price on one's wicket, no. He was out for blood. General simply told him, "I want to see the field spread out when you return to the dressing room." He was here for a cameo. He was served slow, loopy deliveries, turning right into his arc, and he duly deposited them into the stands. Cannonball calmly kept handing him the strike. Admiral wasn't amused at being forced into damage control, especially in a session he was winning. Eventually, someone did dismiss Sniper, but that

only left Professor and Cannonball a couple of overs to negotiate before Dinner. They did so comfortably, adjourning at 336 for 5.

Dinner, Day 4

Quartermaster had a lot of things to say, but General felt it was best to let Professor and Cannonball stay in their bubble at Dinner. It was true that the team batted brilliantly, but the match situation was still precarious: they were effectively only 124 for 5, with a full session under the lights lying ahead.

Cannonball faced the first ball post Dinner. The last night was still playing on the opposition's mind, and they were now drained, both mentally and physically. Cannonball smelled blood. He advanced down the track to the pace spearhead, converted the delivery into a wide half volley, and sent it sailing over the long-off fence. "Dangerous batting," Quartermaster was aghast. "Looks like Professor approves though," grinned General, "and so do I! Come on boys, out to the balcony where our batters can see us getting behind them." Cannonball played out the rest of the over sensibly.

In the next over, Professor was dealt a short ball. But it came as a half-tracker, not nearly as nasty as intended. He flicked it over the square-leg fence. "See? I told you Professor approved." said General, laughing and clapping loudly. Lieutenant, ever the hype-man, whistled. Wizard and the bowlers, who were padded-up, felt their hearts get lighter.

With the dew coming in, bowling spinners to give the quicks respite was out of the question. *Respite*. But wasn't it supposed to be their session? Hadn't Cannonball read the script? This audacious young man marched to his own drum, playing the session like a limited overs game, clearing the infield, piercing the gaps at will. When the field was adjusted to Cannonball, it leaked runs to Professor's more conventional approach.

Admiral fell back on increasingly defensive plans as Cannonball grew in confidence. It was well and truly clear where the momentum lay - when Cannonball reached his hundred, he punched the air, took his helmet off, and roared in delight. He felt like a victorious matador who had taken the bull by the horns. The crowd was deafening. He looked to the dressing room. "Go on, and on, and on!" motioned General. Cannonball saluted.

Admiral knew that he needed just one opening to get back in the game. He got one when Professor nicked one to the keeper, against the run of play. Suddenly, the fielding team was buzzing again, attacking the new man Wizard. That did not deter Cannonball in the slightest, in fact, it incited him as he knew it was now or never, as wickets would inevitably tumble at the other end. He remained unbeaten, as the team was bowled out for 477 just before Stumps, the lead being a competitive 265.

Day 5

General and his men huddled just inside the boundary rope. “Two hundred and sixty-five,” said General, slowly. “That’s how many runs we’ve pulled ourselves ahead by. Two hundred and sixty-*six*. That’s how many they need to score to take this match away from us.” He looked around at his team with a passionate, piercing gaze. “They have to get these runs against *our* attack. They have to pry every single one of them from *our* team.” He turned to talk to individuals, making empowering eye contact. “Sniper, show us how to support our attack. Bomber, give them hell. Wizard, keep them guessing. Agent, don’t let them know what hit them. And, Demon,” he lowered his voice, radiating the killer instinct, “*breathe fire.*”

The opening batters were greeted with moderately cloudy skies, and an ultra-attacking field that conveyed that General meant business, regardless of whether the weather Gods did. Three slips, a gully, and... a short-leg and a leg slip?! The batter took a step back, and shifted his weight to the back foot. Pink Demon sent down a well-directed short ball. It was barely fended off the chest, and almost carried to short-leg. Nerves set in, and the batter was pinned back. The next delivery was full, and straight as an arrow, thudding into the pads. If not for the adrenaline, it was a painfully obvious psychological ploy. The finger went up, and the slip cordon erupted in delirious joy. The batter suspected the left-armer pitched it outside leg... but that objection was overruled by Umpire’s Call. 0 for 1.

Pink Demon and Admiral seemed to continue from where they left off in the last session they faced each other. Admiral didn’t perceive 266 to be a very large target, so he was quite content to bide his time. Pink Demon was on a roll, leading an attack that had the wind at its back. Swinging balls found outside edges, and even get-out-of-jail drives went straight to the only man patrolling the covers - a testament to the trap setting. Admiral desperately tried to steady the ship, but by Tea, he found his team teetering at 70 for 4.

Tea, Day 5

“Two wickets for few runs before Dinner” said Quartermaster, “and then they won’t be able to win from under that kind of pressure.” General tossed the ball to Wizard and Professor - spin from both ends. They exploited the cracks quite skilfully, and Wizard, in particular, was nigh impossible to pick. Even Admiral was consistently getting beaten on both edges. Tank and Cannonball were fielding at short-leg and silly point, and they felt like returning the sledging favour. “Admiral, Admiral, bring the ship to me” sang one. He would get beaten the next ball. “Admiral, Admiral, all at sea!” completed the other.

But Admiral stubbornly hung on. The runs dried up. His partner got out to a superb reflex catch by Tank at short-leg, when he tried to nudge Wizard around the corner for a single. The next batter tried to replicate Sniper’s

heroics. He came down the track, but Wizard got the ball to turn sharply from a crack. The batter looked back in dismay. “Lol” said General, completing the stumping.

And once again, Admiral found himself forced into damage control mode in the evening session, which ended with him shepherding the innings to 124 for 6. He resolved to bat for a win, no matter what.

Dinner, Day 5

It came down to the last session. 30 overs to play, 142 runs, or 4 wickets to force a result. Pink Demon started proceedings, and announced his intent with a quick short pitched delivery. Admiral announced his intent by ramping it over General’s head for six. The last recognised batter held his own against Pink Demon. General kept calm. He knew that an onslaught was coming, given Admiral’s calibre. But he also knew that there were still plenty of runs to play with. He gave Agent and Bomber long spells, and stationed Sniper where his presence would be most annoying to batters looking for a convenient single. Bomber was impossible to put away without taking risks, and hence, he was economical. Five. Ten. Fifteen quiet overs. Still 80 to get. Admiral ordered his partner to take on the bowling. Agent saw the pre-empted aggression, and fired in a pinpoint yorker. 3 wickets to go!

Admiral was too good at farming the strike, but he lapsed. Pink Demon was brought on for a short burst, once the tail-ender was on strike at the start of an over. He was clinical. Dot, dot, dot, bowled! 60 runs at run-a-ball, and two wickets.

General knew that now he was the one playing for the win. He sensed that Admiral would take the game to a position he was unlikely to lose from, and then try to hit out. He had to save his frontline bowlers for the final overs. He swapped Agent out of the attack, and brought Sniper on. Admiral eschewed risks, but still manufactured boundaries, and the single off the penultimate or final ball. Somewhere along the way, he brought up his second hundred of the match, but barely celebrated.

30 were needed off the final two overs. Two wickets still remained. Pink Demon charged in for his final over. Unfortunately for Admiral, he wasn’t on strike. This could be over in two balls. The first ball was the trademark inswinging yorker. The tailender had no chance. Pink Demon had his second five wicket haul of the match, but didn’t even notice. In walked the trembling number eleven. Admiral couldn’t bear to look, but he also had to back up. Somehow, the batter managed to dig it out. They scrambled for a single.

And then, Admiral swung like a man possessed. Pink Demon missed his length by just an inch, and the ball disappeared over the midwicket fence. The next wide yorker sailed over point. And, for the one over there were no slips, an edge went past the diving General for four. Admiral earned his luck. He calmly

drove the last ball to long-off for a single to keep the strike. 12 needed off the last over. Admiral was thinking in limited overs mode, a draw didn't even cross his mind as an admissible option.

Agent took a deep breath at the top of his run-up. Lieutenant was happy with the field. Admiral surveyed the leg-side. General noticed, and waved to Sniper on the midwicket fence. He pretended to adjust where Sniper positioned himself. Agent bowled it at a hard length, into the body. Admiral played with soft hands. "Two!" was the call. Just as he turned after the first run, he noticed Sniper approaching the ball. But he couldn't recall his throwing arm. He knew that he had that vital information tucked somewhere. He could abort the run, or could he? There was just a split second of hesitation, as doubt sowed over the course of an entire Test grew on Admiral. Sniper only worked with motor memory, as he effortlessly picked, and fired a throw at the keeper's end. A direct hit!

Pandemonium broke loose. General was convinced Sniper had his man, and celebrated. Admiral sat on the ground in disbelief. Replays confirmed what the players already knew: he was caught short by just an inch. He finally remembered: *Sniper was ambidextrous!*

The formal process of reviewing the runout served to calm the emotions, and everyone realised what a magnificent game they had been part of. Handshakes and congratulations were exchanged, and even the generally arrogant sailors came to genuinely respect their opponents... until the day they faced off again.